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STANDARDS IN NURSING THE INSANE *

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ALL young men and young women who enter training schools of the hospitals for the insane are beginning a kind of work than which few professions are more exacting, few are more useful, few are nobler. To such I would say you will go forth into the busy world to aid, to guide, to comfort. Your strong arms will support the weak; your calmness and gentleness will encourage and reassure the doubtful; your ready action will alleviate and assuage the ills of those who suffer.

But you will find that your duties outside of the hospital will be vastly heavier than within its walls. You will find that you must give greater heed to the wishes of relatives, for affection and relationship have their rights. You will perceive that the atmosphere of routine and of obedience is largely absent in the home. You will be thrown often upon your own resources in the intervals between the visits of the, perhaps distant, physician. You will, in short, soon realize that your course of study has not given you a perfect preparation for all the possibilities of your work; it has only taught you how to think, how to act and, most important of all, how to learn. You are to-day on the threshold of a life of constant study, and constant endeavor to advance and to gain more knowledge.

The nurse, who on graduation thinks himself perfectly equipped, has no conception of the facts in the case. This is not the time to relax and to abandon effort. If you would succeed in the race of your chosen life-work, you must urge on your boat, "with ambition at the paddle and hope at the prow."

Let me quote you Amiel's words: "He who is silent is forgotten; he who abstains is taken at his word; he who does not advance falls back; he who stops is overwhelmed, distanced, crushed; he who ceases to grow greater becomes smaller; he who leaves off gives up; the stationary condition is the beginning of the end—it is the terrible symptom which precedes death."

Do not, then, deceive yourselves. You cannot afford to look back with complacency; you must gather together the strength that your term of practice has given you and press on, receptive, eager, sincere

* An address to the graduates of the training school of the Manhattan State Hospital, June 3, 1908.

and enthusiastic, if you are to make a success of your profession, always actuated by a true ideal, never harboring in your thoughts for a moment the words of delusion and of folly that we hear idly quoted,—“The world owes me a living,”—but feeling the genuine sentiment of the manly or womanly heart—*I owe the world a life.*

There are all kinds of nurses. In some parts of the country a tender feeling exists toward “the good old-fashioned nurse” so-called. She should be denominated the bad old creature, for she it is who thinks dirt is necessary and “natural,” who cooks up messes, who unites the qualities of an ignorant servant with a soothing and familiar manner. “Eyes have they, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not.” Thank God they are rapidly becoming extinct.

Then there is the severely scientific nurse, who regards her patient merely as so much material to be dealt with impartially and with regularity. At regular intervals she presents definite quantities of certain combinations of proteids, carbohydrates and fats, which, by means of the proper conveyer, she introduces into the oral cavity of the patient who thus receives alimentation. Such a nurse is difficult and impossible, and I doubt if she succeeds. I do not know anyone who employs her a second time.

There are some nurses who have absorbed so much medical lore that they begin to believe they know as much as the physicians do. This is a dangerous condition of mind if the nurse is to be valuable. Let us ever adhere to our own profession, and busy ourselves in our own field. But of all things let the good trained nurse be loyal to the physician, and remember that a constant enforcing of his orders, unmodified save by other medical opinion when he cannot be reached, with scrupulous avoidance of any disparagement of him or of other physicians, are requisites of prime importance.

Add to your loyalty readiness. Stand with me in the door of a fire-engine house in the city, as an alarm of fire is given. At the first few strokes of the gong the men on duty glide to the stalls, unfasten the horses who go quickly to their places beneath the suspended harness, which is drawn down and clasped together about them with a few skilful motions. “Clang! Clang!” speaks the gong, in measured tones. The men who have been resting in the upper story spring from their beds, draw on their boots and slide down the brass-shod pole through the opening in the centre of the floor, and land at the side of the engine. Each man springs to his position. “Clang!” says the warning gong. The pipe which connects the steam chest with the boiler of the engine is uncoupled, leaving several pounds of pressure within the boiler. The fuel in the box of the engine is ignited; the chain is pulled away

from the doorway; the horses spring eagerly forward and leap into the street, and the engine, scattering sparks in its trail, is off on its errand of salvation, within a very few minutes of the incidence of the first note of the gong. The central idea of the whole orderly, consecutive, perfect action is expressed by the word *ready*.

Ready, ay ready! That is the watchword of the nurse. Equipped, intelligent, competent, self-controlled in the hour of accident or injury, at the crisis of a disease, during the surgical operation of great gravity, she stands ready. Young men, young women, can we rely upon you to be ready?

An old German motto runs "*Arbeit edelt*"—Work ennobles. We all need to recall this fact at times. The work of the sick room is so often distasteful, if we consult ourselves and our convenience or comfort. But it is all part of a great scheme. No part of the care of the ill is menial work. No part of it is beneath us as nurses in ordinary, or as physicians in extremity.

Fidelity and endurance are of great importance; nay, they are of the utmost importance in the life-work you have chosen. You must be patient, you must be good-natured and ever cheerful, whether a retinue of servants is at hand to save your steps, or whether you are the sole intelligent person in a tenement kitchen, which forms the living-room of a family; for you must always remember that it is given to you, in larger measure than to any others, to contribute to the total of "the greatest good to the greatest number" in this world of suffering.

There are some facts regarding the families in which you will nurse, which, though private or even secret, will come to your knowledge. Of these strictly private family matters you must be oblivious, and you must close your eyes and seal your ears in every instance, never carrying away with you anything of this nature, never by any accident repeating secrets or betraying the confidence which led to your being placed in such a position as to share the family privacy.

In your intercourse with the families of patients, and the patients themselves, do not tell tales and amusing stories at the expense of prior patients or their relatives. People will laugh at such recitals, and most people will pry into the secrets which rest in your keeping, through the unfortunately universal love of gossip. But even those who laugh will not respect you for repeating the stories. Your attitude in this matter, fully as much as your ability to nurse, will be taken as an index of your character and worth. Establish a reputation for alertness, readiness, and a friendly though professional bearing.

Let me briefly suggest the importance of not reading magazines or novels, or writing your letters in the patient's room. It is, from one

point of view, most important. The patient must always receive the first consideration, and your personal affairs and recreations must be kept in the background.

Nursing the insane, all things considered, covers perhaps the most difficult field of nursing, if done well. The structure that is growing upon the broad foundations laid by men and women who have for years labored for the insane is now becoming visible above the sky-line of other human achievements. We are on the threshold of important advances in the care and treatment and the cure of the insane. The measures adopted by the "after-care committees," with their personal help to the recovering patient and their salutary instruction of his family; the most valuable suggestions to the general practitioner in the way of prevention of insanity, as made by Meyer, Hoch and others; the increasing activity of interested people, medical and lay, in the care of the insane before commitment, all combine not only to relieve, but also to prevent insanity and to reduce in the future the tendency to the condition which we call unsoundness of mind. A splendid opportunity is about to open up before you. I charge you, be alert. Read everything that comes from the pens of such men as Meyer and the medical superintendents who are centering their efforts upon prevention of insanity and shortening the attacks of that condition. Keep more than abreast of this work and retain the advantage you now possess. Let the general practitioner, as well as the specialist, know of your special line of study, and to your kind ministrations will be entrusted the most interesting incipient cases of mental disturbance, with their brilliant possibilities, and with corresponding opportunities for yourselves.

Intelligent, faithful, helpful, watchful, ready, confident, and worthy of full confidence you must be, but do not for a moment lose sight of the fact that you must ever remain patient, forbearing, gentle and kind, without any exception and without any reservation. A hard task, a difficult life, a severe demand, you will say. Yes, I answer, all these; a hard task, but one that brings with it its rewards, a difficult life, but what life is more useful? A severe demand, but you, young men and young women, are the ones to whom the community looks for courageous and immediate response to such a demand; you are they who do not shrink, whose hearts beat not a stroke faster when sudden responsibility falls upon you. The time is coming, ay, it is now here, when the nurse of the insane receives due appreciation. A few months ago a nurse at a hospital for the insane intercepted, at the risk of his life, an infuriated insane man in the industrial building who, armed with a sharp knife, was about to attack another patient with whom he was in altercation. A few years ago a nurse sprang into the river and rescued from drowning

a patient who had flung himself into the water. These deeds of heroism are notable and distinguished; but they are no more admirable or useful than the accomplishments of the nurse who quietly, day by day, week by week, month by month, teaches the patient the same lesson of daily conduct, forming anew the lost habits, re-educating the retrograded mentality, rebuilding, atom by atom, the dethroned faculties.

“Can’st thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the hidden troubles of the brain;
And with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?”

What life more useful, what existence more glorious?

To achieve the best in your profession you must combine many accomplishments and possess many attributes. The late Dr. William H. Draper of New York City, a wise, cultured and beloved physician of the highest type, compared the well-trained nurse with the massive sphinx, that great mystery which will, for succeeding ages, as in the past, stand inscrutable on the plain of Thebes, with the lithe, supple, powerful body of a lion, and the tender and gentle head and breasts of a woman. Is there anything in art, in allegory or in history stronger or more comprehensive than such a combination? It is a valuable thought.

There is a story told, ’tis only a simple legend, of a young painter struggling for recognition in a foreign land. He was engaged upon a picture that he thought would be his masterpiece, the story runs. There was nothing especially striking in his subject, nor in his handling of it. There was nothing unusual in his drawing. There was no special boldness in grouping or in composition. But the color was surprising. He was using a strikingly brilliant red. His fellow students came to his little room day after day, to look over his shoulder and watch the work grow under his brush. “It is a warm beautiful red,” they said, “but it will not last. When it dries out it will be dim. It will be subdued in time. Its brilliancy will not be permanent.” But they were wrong. It did last. It did not fade. Its brilliancy did persist—vivid, bright, admirable, remarkable. One day when they entered his room they found the beautiful picture with its unique red standing on the easel, but at the foot of it the painter lay, dead. They raised him and carried him to his bed, and as they laid him down, they found an open wound over his heart.

Young men, young women, if you put your heart’s blood into your work, the color will never fade.